

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 ROME 08188 182154Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----190909Z 069808 /15

R 181730Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4711
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

S E C R E T ROME 8188

EXDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE'S OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS:
SUBJECT: THE VATICAN AND USSR--A CSCE DEVELOPMENT

1. VERY RELIABLE VATICAN SOURCE TOLD US THAT SOVIET EMBASSY ROME RECENTLY INFORMED VATICAN THAT SOVIETS HAVE ALLOWED THE OPENING OF FOUR CATHOLIC "PRAYER CENTERS" IN CENTRAL ASIA. THESE CENTERS WILL BE INITIALLY STAFFED BY ITINERANT PRIESTS FROM BALTIC REPUBLICS.

2. VATICAN IS EXTREMELY SECRETIVE ABOUT THIS DEVELOPMENT. VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTER CASAROLI IN OUR RECENT CSCE CONSULTATIONS MENTIONED SEVERAL "SMALL STEPS" BY SOVIETS IN FULFILLMENT OF BASKET THREE PROVISIONS OF HELSINKI FINAL ACT (E.G. PERMISSION TO SHIP RELIGIOUS BOOKS INTO LITHUANIA, PERMISSION TO BISHOPS TO TRAVEL TO U.S. AND ROME) BUT DID NOT SPECIFICALLY CITE THIS ITEM WHICH APPEARS TO US TO BE FIRST SIGNIFICANT USSR CONCESSION TO VATICAN SINCE WORLD WAR II.

3. PERHAPS CASAROLI RETICENCE ON SUBJECT DUE TO NORMAL VATICAN CAUTION AND WISH TO VERIFY IMPLEMENTATION

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DIRECTLY THROUGH OWN SOURCES. ALTERNATIVELY, THERE MAY EXIST BILATERAL AGREEMENT NOT TO REVEAL DEVELOPMENT UNTIL BELGRADE. CERTAINLY IT WOULD BE TO SOVIET INTEREST TO DRAMATIZE DEVELOPMENT IN BELGRADE FORUM.

4. DELAY IN MAKING PUBLIC SOVIET CONCESSION MAY ALSO SERVE AS SWORD TO DEFLECT VATICAN CRITICISM OF SOVIET

PERFORMANCE PRIOR TO BELGRADE. IN THIS THE SOVIETS
MAY HAVE COPIED A VATICAN TACTIC. WE KNOW THAT VATICAN
HAS DELAYED SEVERAL TIMES PLANS FOR PUBLICATION OF
HELSINKI FINAL ACT AND IS USING THIS AS INSTRUMENT TO
OBTAIN MORE CONCESSIONS FROM EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
BY INDICATING THAT AN ANNEX TO THE ACT WOULD INCLUDE
VARIOUS VATICAN STATEMENTS REFLECTING ON PROGRESS MADE
IN IMPLEMENTATION SINCE SIGNING OF ACT IN 1975. (A
SIMILAR APPROACH WAS USED BY VATICAN IN CONTACTS WITH
CZECHOSLOVAKIAN GOVERNMENT IN LATE 1976 PRIOR
TO THE DRAFTING OF THE POPE'S STATE-OF-THE-WORLD
MESSAGE.)GARDNER

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, CATHOLICS, PLACES OF WORSHIP, ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 18-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977ROME08188
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770178-0334
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770543/aaaablip.tel
Line Count: 74
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8acae390-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2469398
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE VATICAN AND USSR--A CSCE DEVELOPMENT
TAGS: PFOR, VT, UR, CSCE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8acae390-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009